

THE WORLD OF ART: A Happy Exhibition at Old Lyme



"Verna." By Rudolph Tandler.

Woodstock Art Association Exhibition, 1924.

THE art exhibition at Old Lyme shines like a good deed in a naughty world. It is so good and so happy that little by-gone Pollyanna would have seemed a wicked pessimist in comparison. To the artists at Lyme pleasantness is truth, and entering the beautiful little gallery is to enter upon pleasantness in extraordinary degree. Nature is responsible in part. When one of the most charming regions of Connecticut is chosen for a painting camp and persistently visited until every feature and element of its charms is committed to memory and persistently painted with an idolizing affection, what does one expect? The more closely an Old Lyme picture is made to resemble an Old Lyme landscape the lovelier it is, and it is crass stupidity to express one's self when expressing Old Lyme is a practical possibility. There are few figure subjects in the annual exhibitions and few canvases painted away from the vicinity and few efforts to pass the objective world through temperaments. Or else all the temperaments are so sympathetic to the visible scene that any such process can only intensify its natural character.

In the present exhibition the picture taking the Museum Purchase Prize is "Autumn Afternoon," by Everett Warner. It goes to the Oklahoma Art League in Oklahoma City, and will take with it all the dreamy and drowsy sweetness of the place where the gallery stands, a little pond, crooked trees, a boat drawn up the bank. A few trained observers may notice with interest that what keeps the composition from closing in oppressively about you is the arrangement of diagonal lines, boat, shadows, &c., leading outward toward the horizon. You may not care to know why your pleasure is greater in such a composition of lines than in one cabined and confined by horizontals and perpendiculars, and of course it is always your privilege to remain in ignorance of the devices by which an artist creates a desired impression. The Oklahoma man need only know that in one way or another the Connecticut man has made visible the possibility of moving away from the special locality of his picture toward the wider world—toward Oklahoma, let us say. He need not know that much. Only that he likes his picture.

Gregory Smith's landscapes are

equally natural but a shade less particular, as though nature had shaken herself and ruffled herself a bit, as though she were disregarding the mirror held up to her in the interests of a freer pose. Handsome paintings.

Will S. Taylor's picture of "Pleasant Valley," a blue patch of water cutting its way sharply between high hills, communicates a sense of atmosphere and temperature quite other than those of the Lyme region. The temperature low, the atmosphere thin, the cold and clarity affecting, of course, the appearance of the physical scene, and legitimately taken into account by a painter. It would be difficult to say what may not be

thus legitimately taken into account if the painter has sufficiently keen observing vision. That he must select from thousands of appearances makes it more interesting.

The landscape painter at Lyme still inclines to select from the impressionist's stock. If he is painting a garden full of iris in bloom, as George Burr delightfully has done this year, he tells the truth of the outlines of stem and petal disappearing and reappearing in the quivering light of out of doors. In telling that truth he may of course sacrifice other truths upon which fifty other painters may pounce. He gives you color, light, the movement of air, enough, certainly, for pleasantness.

George Bruestle gives you a little less of this and a little more of the drama in which nature even at Lyme, even anywhere, is rich. Darkness, cold color, hints of violent motion not yet released, and, in contrast, thick, oily material quality.

Clark G. Voorhees in "Honeyuckle and Rose" offers a trim and slightly prim portrait of an old, well-preserved house, its beauty of proportion heightened by the beautiful ornament of the Summer blossoms crowding up to it. Wilson Irvine has lost his heart to the tremulous interlace of foliage in a green wood, Carleton Wiggins and sheep are almost inseparable in the contemporary mind. In one picture the interior of a sheepfold in Holland is beautifully painted in the old brown way with a streak of gold sunlight coming in through the open door and striking athwart a line of blunt tails and fleecy rumps. William H. Howe also has done a sheep stable in browns, and the two darkish, quiet pictures have a curiously comforting quality as when you actually do come into a shaded room out of sunlight a trifle too strong for your eyes.

Charles Bittinger paints wall paper, the ancient landscape type still to be seen on the walls of Marblehead, and utters an irrelevant truth in making his figure of a woman in the foreground meekly subordinate in interest to the wall paper. What is a youthful woman in comparison with an antique wall paper?

The question of placing pictures has become, very literally, a vexed one. Walls are considered with reference to the rest of the interior as they have not been for many years past, certainly not since the fading of the stately British tradition sustained by the Colonists. And in addition the architect and the interior decorator of the present day are not inclined to provide liberal spaces for

pictures. One naturally thinks in passing through an exhibition gallery of the kind of environment suited to the individual pictures. If one has seen many exhibitions of modern interior decoration it is natural to let one's mind wander from purely esthetic considerations to those of a simple decorative unity between a

given painting and its possible surroundings. Thus one sees that the rather dry pigment and rather open texture in favor with many of the Lyme painters will harmonize very pleasantly with the old soft printed cottons and unvarnished woods of a particularly modest and expensive type of American interior today. On



"Lady Jean." By George Bellows.

Woodstock Exhibition.

the other hand, the landscape by Bruce Crane, too luscious and glowing for such a setting, would be at home with Eastern porcelains, silks and metals. The material integrity of Percival Roussau's bird dogs, irrespective of their reading of dog character, makes them proper companions for Duncan Phylle's incorruptible furniture. In neither case would there be any spitting or cracking or peeling, any evidence of evil workmanship.

The Eaton Purchase Prize is taken by a flower subject, "Potpourri," by Harry L. Hoffman, a fine old sculptured pottery jar filled with a "mixed bouquet" of yellow daisies, larkspurs, snapdragons, on a strip of robin's egg blue table, and against a background of fused colors. Probably not so difficult a technical achievement, the other flower painting by the same artist, "A Deep Blue Vase," has superior merits as a thing repeatedly to look at. The mahogany desk on which the vase stands, and the upward darting spire of flowers from the vase that is built up round on round of glorious blue, make an impression of special distinction.

It is unnecessary to mention every one of the pictures shown and artists showing. The exhibits are characteristic and equal to the best in former Lyme exhibitions. Within the memory of the writer there has been no exhibition of this group more even in quality. If proof were needed of the vitality of the tradi-



"Autumn Afternoon." By Everett Warner.

Awarded Museum Purchase Prize, Lyme Art Exhibition, 1924.

tion represented by the group, there could be none more convincing than this fresh eager little gesture of thoroughly trained talents, remaining youthful without deserting their own standards in aim and method. The public never tires of them. On the opening day the public swarmed in more liberally than ever, paying over six hundred admission fees in spite of the difficulty of getting to the gallery over roads torn up for construction. Obviously the public likes the Lyme tradition, likes the familiar subjects and familiar methods, and likes—who would not?—such constant pleasantness of temper, such a sustained agreeable mood, such beautiful manners in art. It is a familiarity that breeds no contempt.

The Lyme Art Association, to give it the formal title, for the past year or two has followed out a scheme for presenting a picture from each year's exhibition to one of the several art museums of the country enrolled with the association as museum members. This scheme is one of the best of the many under consideration for the purpose of stimulating interest in American art throughout the country. One living picture is better for such a purpose than one hundred dead reproductions of pictures however fine in the original.

A glimpse of one of the Woodstock exhibitions of the Summer, secured while the exhibition was in process of hanging itself, emphasized the fact that all schools fall more or less into runs of subject and treatment, whether they belong to the liberals or conservatives. The Woodstock exhibition, naturally and properly enough, resembled its predecessor of last season to at least the same degree as the Old Lyme exhibition resembled those that have gone before.

George Bellows in his "Lady Jean" made the most definite impression of originality. His work this year is very much like his work of last year and the year before, but it is like no one else's. "Lady Jean" in the Woodstock Gallery wore the unmistakable look of authority. It held itself proudly, and the wall on which it hung was head of the table by virtue of its hanging there. The stage properties in the composition are noticeable. Chase worked his way into our mundane affections with certain timonias and brasses and embroidered. He carried them with him as royalty carried its bedding in the Middle Ages. He never tired of them more than did we. Mr. Bellows, following the changing taste of the new day, prefers chairs and sofas covered with horsehair buttoned down over solid stuffing, hooked rugs, gowns with basques and ruffles and bustles. Just as beautiful in his competent hands as the Oriental stuffs were in the competent hands of Chase. The horsehair covered, stuffed and buttoned chair jutting into the composition at the left in this recent work fills just the right space and looks more beautiful than it ever did in life. Which is what art is made for. Other handsome accessories are the red cupboard and blue blinds and a blue flower in a vase. In the foreground stands a flower of childhood, blue-eyed in an old-fashioned gown, with lace mitts and lace on her head, the little Lady Jean, as lovely in her new way as the famous Infanta in her old way.

Other interesting pictures already on the walls were John Carroll's "Lydia," very striking in a stained-glass manner; Warren Wheelock's gray man holding a baby, a woman advancing from the background carrying a pail of water, all very solid and granitic; another figure suggesting stone sculpture by Arnold Blanch; a head by Rudolph Tandler of tenderer material, a suave though massive young head, and a lively Fourth of July scene by John Striebel.

CRITICS DEFENDED

The following letter presents the problem of the art critic discussed by H. I. Brock in an earlier issue of the Magazine from another point of view:

To the Art Editor, New York Times:
Are painters and critics justified in declining to look upon a painting as a representation of something seen? Are they not often overemphasizing tricks or mere dexterity in their discussion of contemporary work? These questions are raised in the interesting paper of Mr. H. I. Brock, pub-

"The
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lished in THE NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE of Aug. 10. Agreeing as I do with some of Mr. Brock's strictures upon the new academicism among painters and especially among critics, which treats of painting as a thing of "form" and "technique" quite apart from its living content, there are, nevertheless, a number of qualifications to be offered of Mr. Brock's position.

First of all, it seems to me that Mr. Brock does not sufficiently allow for the diverse impressions of an object viewed from different eyes. The "mere arrangement of pigments or of lines," of which Mr. Brock speaks, and the "hopelessly flat or a lamentably lumpy and lop-sided rep-

resentation of a human figure," may be inherent in the picture. Or they may be attributed to the picture by some one who has not learned to see with the painter's eyes.

A painting or etching or photograph has often value for us, not because of the pleasure we take in recognizing the object represented, but by reason of the new way of seeing which it discloses, the new point of view it opens up to us. A familiar instance is the exploitation of bright, pure color by the French Impressionists and the succeeding groups of painters, to the scandal of the brown-gravy painters. "We have come to know that the greatest possible range of vivid color available within the

convention of painting upon canvas is only a fraction of the range of color and light values disclosed to the eye out of doors. Which necessitates consideration of painting as a convention, precisely as singing or writing poetry are conventions.

The lyric element in painting is manifest when one considers that objects, in themselves not attractive to us, afford occasion for the most stimulating and delightful of paintings. It is something of the painter's own self, the quality of his vision, his philosophy as well as his dexterity—all in the end closely related—that we are given in the painting. And the painting then adds to our visual appreciations. So

that, as in song where it is not the subject merely that delights, the painting has its value irrespective of the subject. A painting appeals to the pleasures and emotions connected with seeing, a sense capable of intense cultivation like hearing.

I do not mean to exclude reference in paintings to the external world. No more so than the words used in song are to be excluded from common speech. But it is unjustifiable to erect as the criterion of a painting the judgment of an untrained eye on whether that painting "looks like" a given object. Habituation and cultivation are essential in looking at pictures. The pictures appeal by resources peculiar to the convention and the medium of painting. And it is perfectly idle to pretend that one entirely unacquainted in that realm can derive the pleasure he would get if he studied and educated himself. There are degrees and degrees of cultivation in picture appreciation. Such cultivation can and often does proceed to a point where a painting gives intense pleasure through its paint and visual elements, although the "subject" of the painting may not be recognizable.

I agree with Mr. Brock that "the material of all the arts remains life"—but the material has to be translated in terms of the medium used. The rhythmic speech of song and epic and the common speech of the day constantly influence each other. There is a comparable interrelation of vision and design. Any work done in the flat may have a greater or less element of design, pattern. And his own perception of design, of harmony and rhythm in the external world, is what the great painter gives us. He may do it even by noting, in color or line relationships, the thing suggested to him, the thing he has felt about what he saw. For his colors and lines have a value as positive in his modulation of them, as have notes in musical composition.

As for the critic, he is on difficult ground when he writes of works of art. At worst, he retails jargon, as Mr. Brock says—or he dogmatizes and generalizes, upon insufficient acquaintance, about "modernism," an entity that does not exist, or about "modern art" which is as various as the creators of pictures. At best the critic can write well, and can interest people sufficiently so that they will take the trouble to look for themselves and to continue their self-education in a field where education is never ended.

HAROLD J. SELIGMAN.

"Ecole de
Ballet."
By
William
Chadwick.

Old Lyme
Exhibition.

